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DAYTON

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 Contact: Teri Rizvi  
 or Deborah McCarty Smith  
 rizvi@udayton.edu

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## NEWS RELEASE

### UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON PROFESSOR'S GROUNDBREAKING BOOK WINS FIRST PLACE IN 2001 CATHOLIC PRESS ASSOCIATION COMPETITION

DAYTON, Ohio — Terrence W. Tilley's groundbreaking book, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, is receiving national acclaim. This spring, the *New York Times* gave the book a favorable review. And now it's won first place in the 2001 Catholic Press Association competition in the category of theology books.

"This is a creative re-thinking of the Catholic meaning of tradition," the judges said. "The author emphasizes practices of the church in tradition rather than the usual treatment of teachings and truths. His strength is to show the process of tradition and not merely the content of tradition. This creative analysis is underscored by the author's successful situation of the study in an historical and cultural context. Tilley is aware of post-modernist challenges and engages them. He also writes in a clear, organized manner while distinctly avoiding theological jargon. Its main audience will be theologians but informed readers will also comprehend it."

Tilley, chair of the religious studies department at the University of Dayton, argues that tradition is more fully understood as a set of ongoing practices constantly being invented. Is Catholic tradition like a heavy gold rock, a weighty object mined in the past that is passed unchanged from one generation to the next? Is it a folded cloak unfolded over time? Are traditions given or are they made?

"If a tradition is not to die, it must be reinvented as the context in which it lives changes," Tilley said. "A living tradition is a set of practices received, renewed and reinvented for another generation to receive, renew and reinvent."

The book has earned acclaim from theologians and scholars who have praised it as "the work of a master" and "some of the best Catholic (and catholic) thinking being done today." The key insight: "Believing is a practice. If we talk about religious belief, we have to take it as one of a set of religious practices people engage in," Tilley said.

The time was ripe for such a book, Tilley pointed out. Since the work of theologian Yves Congar, "almost nothing new and substantive has been done in 40 years — decades in which

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 300 College Park Dayton, Ohio 45469-1679  
 (937) 229-3241 (937) 229-3063 Fax  
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we've seen the development of post-modern thought and the post-Vatican II church and change in the intellectual and religious climate. It was time to rework theology and tradition."

Tilley's book was released almost simultaneously as John Thiel's *Sense of Tradition* (Oxford University Press). Although the two scholars worked independently and have different approaches, "both of us are trying to initiate a new discussion about what it means to live in and live out a tradition." Thiel's book won second-place honors in the competition.

Tilley's work stands in contrast to two camps: those who maintain traditions are deliberately invented and made up — rules imposed by the elite on the non-elite; and those who maintain that traditions are simply things that are found and passed on.

Over the past 20 years, "theologians have recovered a multiplicity of standard Catholic traditions. ... Philosophers and theologians of the last 25 years have shown that traditions are not fixed but fluid," Tilley said. For example, "historians of the Eucharist show us we have had multiple practices. When Pope Pius X, nearly a century ago recommended daily communion, that innovation in practice had repercussions that changed our understanding of the Eucharist and prepared the way for the dialogue mass of the 1950s and the vernacular mass of the 1960s to the present," Tilley said.

"To receive Communion for us today doesn't mean quite what it did in our great grandparents' time. It has a different significance for us, but there is continuity in tradition because the practice is carried on with a similar goal: to live a Christian life as a Catholic for the greater glory of God. The Eucharist feeds us in that."

By contrast, the practice of weekly confession has been largely abandoned. "It may come back," he said, noting that no litmus test exists to measure continuity. "The only way we can discern continuity is whether the practice lives in the community that carries that tradition."

One aspect of the book garnering critical attention is the chapter in which Tilley describes a "grammar" of the Catholic intellectual tradition. The hallmarks of this grammar include an emphasis on an "analogical imagination" — an intellectual practice that seeks to find unity and similarity among events or states of affairs that seem different; a universal hope, an inclusive community, a public church, and a gracious God.

"I'm hopeful that chapter will suggest to folk the range and the depth of the Catholic intellectual tradition," Tilley said. His book, which "is the product of lots of interaction with the faculty of the University of Dayton ... may help make us more conscious about what we're talking about when we're talking about tradition. If we can realize we are bearers and reinventors of tradition, we should realize tremendous freedom and responsibility. We must be free in reinventing what it means to be Catholic, and we carry responsibility to keep tradition alive."